

WASHINGTON, D.C. - President Obama this afternoon will sign into law an important package of public lands laws. The House of Representatives on March 25 approved the legislation by a vote of 285-140. The legislation was passed by the Senate on March 19.

One of the bills contained in this public lands omnibus (a package of more than 160 separate laws) is the Ocean Research and Exploration Enhancement Act, introduced as a stand-alone bill by Congressman Sam Farr (D-Carmel). This legislation will establish two important ocean research programs: the National Undersea Research Program and the National Ocean Exploration Program.

"Our nation's economy and wellbeing is dependent on the ocean, and that's even more true for us on the Central Coast, yet we know so little about this great resource," said Rep. Farr. "We know that the ocean gives us our great weather, draws tourists and brings rain for our farmland, but we know precious little about what's beneath the surface."

The two research programs will provide insight into marine ecosystems, organisms and the geology of the world's oceans. The bill is intended to maximize ocean research effectiveness by integrating multiple scientific disciplines in the ocean science community. The two programs will be administered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in conjunction with the National Science Foundation and other federal agencies.

The goal of the partnerships will be to share NOAA's facilities, technology, equipment, information and expertise with undersea research programs at universities. These programs will provide NOAA with the underwater presence it requires to fulfill its responsibility for managing living marine and coastal resources.

"The Central Coast is already home to one of the most important concentrations of ocean research institutions in the world," Rep. Farr said. "These new programs will open up yet another dimension of research that our brain trust is prepared to take advantage of."

The larger package of bills that was signed into law will create 2 million acres of wilderness land across nine states; designate 1,000 miles of scenic and wild rivers; create three national parks and a national monument; and more. It is the largest expansion of public lands in 15 years.

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